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ABSTRACT

Rhetoricians since Plato's day have been concerned with how much knowledge speakers should possess in order to speak effectively as well as ethically. The expert, like anyone, can err, but the chance of factual error decreases when speakers have a thorough grasp of their subject matter. However, the expertise position can potentially become a means of repressing public expression and quelling challenges to authority. Classical scholars Antonius, Sulpicius, and Gorgias did not require orators to possess specialized knowledge, while Plato and Crassus endorsed thorough education and training as a prerequisite to effective speech. Scaevola favored expertise as a requirement for speech, but believed such knowledge remains in the domain of field-specific specialization, not in the realm of oratory. Many modern dilemmas revolve around these same arguments. Physicians, for instance, are experts in their field, but their authority often goes unchecked by the public, and they often escape responsibility for their actions and medical developments. The public relations problems that surrounded the Three Mile Island incident stemmed from the inability of technical experts to agree with one another and to appease the public's need for reassurance and forthrightness. Such instances indicate that rhetoric should remain within the public or generalist realm, for when it retreats from public accountability, it becomes a tool for manipulation by an elite instead of a means of maintaining and reinforcing the human community. (Seventeen references are included.) (JC)

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Competence, Expertise, and Accountability: Classical Foundations of the Cult of Expertise

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Competence, Expertise, and Accountability:
Classical Foundations of the Cult of Expertise

At least since the controversy between Plato and Gorgias on whether speakers must know "the truth about things" (Gorgias 459b-c) of which they speak, questions about the necessary extent of a speaker's knowledge have frequently arisen in rhetoric. This essay approaches the issue of how much knowledge speakers should possess. Using Plato and Cicero as historical foundations, the discussion proceeds by answering several related questions. First, what degree of specialized knowledge should speakers possess in order to speak well? Second, how can one obtain the requisite knowledge for speaking? Finally, what impact might the requirements for knowledge as a prerequisite for effective speech have for (1) determining who has the ability to speak effectively, and (2) the accountability of speakers for what they say? The answers to the final question receive contemporary application in the cases of medical discourse and rhetoric regarding nuclear power.

Before continuing, two terms deserve clarification. Competence in the context of this discussion refers to a minimum skill in speaking obtainable primarily through everyday societal interaction typical of primary socialization (Berger & Luckmann 130-137). Competence allows the communicator to speak with some degree of knowledge on a variety of subjects, primarily to audiences who lack specialized training in the field(s) being discussed. Expertise refers to a high level of communicative

skill attainable only through specific training, such as formal education and extensive practice in a particular discipline. Expertise applies most frequently to the specialized proficiency of a speaker addressing an audience which possesses greater than average understanding of the subject-matter. Competence deals primarily with public discussion, while expertise seems more suited for discussion among peers within shared specialties.

Gorgias versus Plato

The Position of Gorgias

One of the chief arenas of controversy between Gorgias and Plato encompasses how much and what kind of knowledge speakers should possess of their subject-matter. Gorgias contends that persuasion can "mold the soul in the way it wants" (B11(13)). According to Gorgias, the orator can speak more convincingly than anyone else on any subject (Gorgias 456c, 457a-b). This last statement indicates that the speaker's understanding of the means of convincing provides sufficient skill for applying speech to any area of specialization. In this sense, rhetoric encompasses and "holds under her sway almost all the other professions (Gorgias 456a).

Gorgias boasts that he, as an orator, can convince his brother's patients to take medicine without employing any of his brother's medical knowledge (cf. B11(14)). The orator need have no actual technical understanding of the subject-matter; the appearance of expertise suffices to accomplish the speaker's objectives (Gorgias 459a-c). Gorgias acknowledges that the orator need learn only the art of rhetoric and thereby be as

convincing in most subjects as is the specialist in those subjects (Gorgias 459c).

Gorgias' position on rhetorical knowledge takes an extreme form. Orators need not obtain any understanding of matters that might comprise subjects for speech. Understanding the medium of speech, i.e., the method of producing conviction (Gorgias 453a) is enough to enable speakers to accomplish their chosen ends. This assertion certainly does not imply that those who can speak effectively will always convince. Gorgias does indicate that effectively employed speech, i.e., discourse employed at the right time and tailored to the circumstances (though neither kairos nor to prepon can be predetermined with certainty, only estimated) has the power to persuade (B11(14)).

The Gorgian stance regarding rhetorical knowledge yields interesting consequences. No one has privileged access to knowledge or truth. Since the orator can convince as readily as (and perhaps better than) the expert, effective speech does not depend on speakers having access to truth. This implication minimizes the need for technical expertise. Since humanity has no access to any communicable transcendent truth, there are no experts in the sense of speakers who by the nature of their education (or any other criterion) understand "how things really are." Gorgias never claims to teach arete, and his ethical relativism certainly precludes the possibility of monitoring his students for arete. Neither virtue nor knowledge (assuming a distinction between the two) functions as a requisite for effective speaking.

Gorgias' egalitarian view of knowledge and truth invites comparison with sophists purporting to teach arete to anyone who can afford the price of a course in rhetoric. Upon closer examination, however, it appears that the sophists offer equal access to moral and civic knowledge, but that Gorgias affirms equal denial to such knowledge.

The Position of Plato

Plato's view of the knowledge necessary for an orator contrasts directly with Gorgias' position. Plato erects a division between knowledge and conviction, a differentiation equivalent to the distinction between knowledge and true opinion (Meno 98a). Rhetoric deals only with immediate emotional gratification (Gorgias 501a-b), not with long-term moral benefits or instruction in proper conduct (Gorgias 464b-465a). The preference for teaching rather than pleasing indicates that the speaker should speak with knowledge of "the truly good or honourable" and not "only with opinion about them" (Phaedrus 260a). Rhetoric falls outside the domain of true arts in part since oratory, as pandering, is merely a knack and not an art because it can offer no rational account of its nature or subject matter (Gorgias 465a). Reuniting rhetoric with truth (Phaedrus 260c-e) and requiring rhetoric to give a rational account of itself set the stage for establishing the conditions under which rhetoric could function properly.

The Platonic requirements for rhetoric translate into guidelines for the rhetor. Knowledge of ethics seems a neccesary prerequisite for effective speech. Oratory "should be

used . . . with a view to justice" (Gorgias 527c). Not only should orators speak morally, they must practice virtue (Gorgias 504d-e, 508a-b). The orator who confounds good with evil cannot persuade, for persuasion depends on the knowledge of the truth (Phaedrus 260d), which in turn depends on discerning truth and falsity, as well as comprehending the difference between good and evil. On the other hand, mere knowledge of the truth does not ensure that persuasion will occur (Phaedrus 260d). Possession of the truth accordingly becomes a necessary but not sufficient condition for persuading.

For Plato, mere possession of the truth does not guarantee rhetorical success. What matter more are the means used to assure arrival at truth. The rhetor will never be skillful without having a knowledge of philosophy (Phaedrus 261a). The speaker must have a systematic method for guaranteeing arrival at truth. Like a skilled artisan, the orator proceeds methodically, according to a definite plan (Gorgias 503d-e). Only after this method has been learned and employed can one speak and speak well. The means of reaching knowledge become measures of the systematicity and truth of how the speaker conveys that knowledge. The speaker ignorant of the truth will attain only the ability to deal with appearances, rendering rhetoric a foolish attempt to deceive audiences unable to distinguish appearance from reality (Phaedrus 262c).

Plato extrapolates the method of Socratic elenchus to rhetoric. The orator should employ the Socratic method of collection and division, classifying particulars (Phaedrus

263b-c, 265d-e) and then dividing the particulars "into species according to the natural formation" (Pheadrus 265e). The application of philosophical method to rhetorical procedure conflates two activities: the means for arriving at knowledge and the means for sharing knowledge. Socrates acknowledges that collection and division help him to "speak and to think" (Phaedrus 266b), but he never addresses the possibility that methods of thinking and methods for acting verbally on the basis of thought might differ.

Consequences of the Opposing Positions

Plato and Gorgias represent opposite poles on the issue of what degree of knowledge a speaker should possess. For Gorgias, skill, not knowledge, licenses speech. Mastery of rhetorical techniques should precede oratory. This denial of a moral basis for oratory remains vulnerable to the objection that unqualified or immoral speakers might, through ignorance or demagoguery, mislead or manipulate audiences. Plato responds to this shortcoming by offering a rhetoric that only philosophers can and should practice. Plato's restriction of access to oratory might minimize the attempts of speakers to deceive or manipulate audiences.

The price of this restriction is that Plato's preconditions for speaking narrow speakers to an elite group of experts who understand fully through rigorous training the philosophical basis of rhetoric in the Socratic elenchus (Gorgias 504d-e). In order to secure knowledge, it is necessary to rely on experts in the field being discussed (cf. Laches 184e-185a), thus not all

opinions are equally valuable on all topics (Crito 47a-d). Walter Fisher (77, 87) corroborates this tendency of Platonic rhetoric to defer judgment in public affairs to experts. As a result, not everyone has access to knowledge, since "the world cannot possibly be a philosopher," and "philosophers must inevitably fall under the censure of the world" (Rep. VI.494a). Wisdom remains distinct from "the tempers and tastes of the motley multitude," so the philosopher should not be someone who "consorts with the many" (Rep. VI.493c-d). Since knowledge of philosophy entitles one to employ rhetoric, speech becomes a power held by those qualified to exert it.

Scaevola and Crassus vs. Antonius and Sulpicius

The confrontation regarding the necessary extent of knowledge suitable for an orator reappears in Cicero's De Oratore. In this dialogue, Scaevola aligns most closely with Plato, since both argue for the importance of expert knowledge on the subject being discussed. Antonius and Sulpicius take a position allied to, but not identical with, Gorgias. Gorgias reaches a similar conclusion, that an orator need possess no special expertise in order to speak effectively. For Gorgias, such expertise could mean knowledge of the essence of a subject, which remains logically impossible in Gorgian epistemology. For Antonius and Sulpicius, the assault on expertise rehabilitates the authority and legitimacy of speakers who address subjects in which they lack rigorous formal training. Crassus' stance, although formulated as a response to Scaevola, endorses the Platonic position supporting expertise. The difference between

expertise and competence will receive more thorough treatment later, when expertise becomes linked with moral responsibility.

The Position of Scaevola

Scaevola sets up the restriction of effective speech to a corpus of experts when he makes a Platonic distinction between persuasion and knowledge. Humanity, as it developed, perhaps was "not so much convinced by the reasoning of the wise as snared by the speeches of the eloquent" (De Or. I.36). The beneficial arrangements in states might have arisen not through the efforts of "the wise and valiant but by men of eloquence and fine diction" (De Or. I.36).

Scaevola's polarization of wisdom and rhetorical skill recalls Plato's distinction between rhetoric, which panders to irrational emotions, and wisdom, which appeals systematically to the intellect. Rhetoric becomes a dangerous weapon, particularly in the hands of the uneducated or immoral. The power of rhetoric and the chance that it can and has fallen into hands unable to wield it, explains why Scaevola "could cite more instances of damage done, than of aid given to the cause of the state by men of first-rate eloquence . . . "(De Or. I.38). Scaevola also invokes Socrates against Crassus, claiming that a thorough knowledge of virtue precedes effective speech (De Or. I.42).

Unlike Plato, Scaevola proposes no notion of a 'proper' rhetoric. Scaevola simply recommends that oratory be limited to forensic presentations (De Or. I.44; compare Gorgias 480b-481b). The rhetorician should not claim powers not intrinsic to

rhetoric itself. Unless the orator can claim benefits unique to rhetoricians, then experts in subjects outside the domain of rhetoric, not orators, should speak (De Or. I.44). The orator, in other words, should defer speech to someone trained in the subject under discussion. Plato seeks to make the orator an expert, while Scaevola wants to distinguish experts from orators.

The Retort of Crassus

Crassus responds to Scaevola by arguing that the orator need not avoid treading on the territories of technical experts. Crassus' position becomes ambivalent, however. He claims that the orator needs "width of culture" (De Or. II.80), and that correct Latin style need not stem from special study, since grammatical matters require only common sense and basic schooling (De Or. I.48-49). These remarks seem to indicate that the orator requires no special training.

Crassus' viewpoint is not this simplistic. Instead of arguing that the orator needs no special knowledge, Crassus' ideal orator appears to have expertise in all fields. Antonius cites Charmadas as believing that "no one could speak with address or copiously unless he had mastered the philosophical teachings of the most learned men" (De Or. I.93). Charmadas had praised Crassus for his fulfillment of this standard, which Crassus apparently endorses. Crassus does maintain that "the consummate orator possesses all the knowledge of the philosophers . . . " (De Or. III.143).

Crassus' position, similar to the conception of the orator

Cicero posits in his prefatory remarks, lends itself to the interpretation that orators must become experts in their fields of discussion. Since the orator's subjects come from all areas, the speaker must claim "all knowledge for his province as well" (De Or. II.5). Knowledge becomes the primary measure of oratorical excellence, since

> no man can be an orator complete in all points of merit, who has not attained a knowledge of all important subjects and arts. For it is from knowledge that oratory must derive its beauty and fullness, and unless there is such knowledge, well-grasped and comprehended by the speaker, there must be something empty and almost childish in the utterance. (De Or. I.20)

The ideas of breadth and depth of knowledge occur in this statement. The orator's knowledge must range over the whole of potential subject-matters. Knowledge also must not consist of mere acquaintance, but requires mastery of the subject.

The rhetor's province includes "the entire field of practical philosophy" (De Or. II.122), and education permits entry to this province. Orators should first learn the technical matters about which they will speak. Only then can orators "speak about them far better than even the men who are masters of these arts" (De Or. I.65). Rhetorical knowledge becomes superimposed on the technical knowledge required to master other skills. Taken to an extreme, Crassus' opinion leads to the elder Cato's pronouncement that the proper words

automatically follow from thorough knowledge of the subject-matter. Crassus stops just short of such a total reliance on knowledge as a necessary and sufficient condition for effective speech, although he contends that "a full supply of facts begets a full supply of words" (De Or. III.125).

The Reply of Sulpicius

The plausibility of interpreting Crassus as endorsing expertise emerges in Sulpicius' reply to Crassus' idea of oratorical training. Sulpicius believes that orators need not become experts in their subject-matter, because "our ordinary acquaintance with legal and public affairs is extensive enough for the eloquence I have in view" (De Or. III.147)

Sulpicius' contention highlights two points. First, access to eloquence remains open to anyone who has the natural talent to engage in oratory. The ordinary citizen, untrained in technical forensic matters, could still voice an opinion in court. The position taken by Sulpicius would not sanction denial of speech merely on the basis of a lack of technical knowledge. Second, the sources of knowledge necessary for eloquence remain open to public access. The untrained, like Sulpicius, can simply "look up" the information they need to know in order to discuss technical matters (De Or. III.147). Sulpicius treats competence, i.e., general understanding, as sufficient to allow for conversation. For Sulpicius, a little knowledge is not a dangerous thing, but it is the realistic expectation for engaging in discourse.

The Contribution of Antonius

Antonius also aligns himself against expertise in direct response to Crassus. The requirement of learning all matters thoroughly not only seems impractical because it is "hard to win," but it also threatens to make all discourse philosophical instead of suiting the style of the situation (De Or. I.81). Competence, not expertise, in a broad range of matters suffices for the orator, who should not claim all knowledge "as his own possession," but remain content with "tasting what belongs to others" (De Or. I.218). Antonius' view of rhetoric provides access to speech for anyone having a modicum of persistence and intellectual acumen. For this reason, "many a man, whatever his class or his calling, attains some degree of proficiency even without any regular training" (De Or. II.38). Some skills traditionally reserved for rhetorical training become matters of common sense: "But what type of proofs best befits each type of case needs not consummate art to dictate, but only ordinary talent to decide" (De Or. II.175).

The analysis of the competence/expertise debate in De Oratore sheds light on different versions of the same controversy between Gorgias and Plato. Antonius, Sulpicius, and Gorgias, although for different reasons, do not require the effective orator to possess esoteric or specialized knowledge. Gorgias believes that knowledge, at least of the type Plato seeks, is logically impossible to obtain or communicate. Antonius and Sulpicius contend that specialized knowledge serves no use in oratory. Plato and (to an extent) Crassus, endorse

thorough education and training as a prerequisite to effective speech. Scaevola favors expertise as a requirement for speech, but believes such knowledge remains in the domain of field-specific specialization, not in the realm of oratory. The next section applies the competence/expertise controversy to more modern examples and offers ethical implications of equating rhetorical skill with expertise.

Applications and Implications

Advocating expertise as a criterion for effective speaking serves a useful function: it minimizes the chance of inaccurate information being disseminated. The expert, like anyone else, can err, but the chance of factual error should diminish when speakers have a thorough grasp of their subject-matter. Despite this advantage, the expertise position wields the potential to become a means of repressing public expression and quelling challenges to authority.

The distinction between expertise and competence parallels in some respects the difference between technical knowledge and social knowledge. Communication involving technical knowledge requires speakers to possess, and their audiences to have, "a technical or specialized knowledge (Farrell, "Knowledge" 4). The focus in technical rhetoric remains on the accuracy of the speaker's knowledge. This emphasis concerns the status of a speaker's knowledge claims, i.e., their truth, justifiability, etc. Such claims lie outside the province of speaker-audience relationships, particularly if truth is defined as a Platonic correspondence to or participation in a higher reality such as

essences or forms. Testing of social knowledge, on the other hand, relies more on the audience's presumed consensus of understanding (Farrell, "Knowledge" 6, 7). Rhetoric involving social knowledge, therefore, regards the speaker as maintaining "a personal relationship to other actors in the social world" (Farrell, "Knowledge" 5). This personal relationship becomes necessary because the audience itself adjudicates claims of truth or merit.

The precise nature of social knowledge requires no lengthy elaboration here, but the claim that rhetorical activities deal with social knowledge deserves attention. If rhetoric deals with contingencies and access to speech is not limited by specific educational or other prerequisites based on technical knowledge, then how can audiences adjudicate disputes between authorities? This question becomes crucial if the goal of knowledge becomes creation of solidarity and community rather than correspondence to a criterion of truth apart from discourse (Farrell, "Knowledge" 11; Rorty 1).

The distinction between technical knowledge, which demands expertise, and social knowledge, which relies on competence, presents a dilemma. If all knowledge is social and requires no rigorous training to employ or understand, then all speakers appear equally competent. On the other hand, if knowledge acquisition and dissemination stays in the hands of the technical experts, then how can the practices of those experts be subjected to scrutiny?

The first aspect of the dilemma, that authority vanishes,

represents an over-reaction. Authority does not vanish as the the importance of expertise declines. Rather, authority becomes relative to specific rhetorical contexts (Farrell, "Knowledge" 6). For example, instead of treating philosophers or physicians as wielding authority on all matters of import, a social competence perspective would submit that experts in these fields forward claims that make sense for the particular groups they address. In other words, tests of rhetorical effectiveness rest outside the domain of technical mastery in a specialized field. Such a perspective does not preclude experts from making important claims, but it does allow the opportunity to question claims that might otherwise win acceptance on the basis of who uttered them.

The second half of the dilemma, that expertise engenders repression of speech, constitutes a more serious problem. The difficulty arises when expertise transmutes into authority. Two examples uncover how such a metamorphosis occurs: medical communication and conflicts among experts.

Medical Communication

Medical training invests physicians with supreme authority to distinguish between sickness and health and to determine appropriate treatments for illnesses (Illich 46-47). The rigor of medical training, while producing skilled doctors, simultaneously allows for two types of repressive consequences. First, the use of expertise tends to thwart rapid innovation. Although the medical community introduced advancements such as contraception and smallpox vaccination, these achievements not

only comprise credits to the knowledge necessary for their production, but also to the skills in disseminating the innovations to the people who would employ these preventive measures. Illich contends: "The most recent shifts in mortality from younger to older groups can be explained by the incorporation of these procedures and devices into the layman's culture" (21). The products of technical expertise would amount to no more than idle novelties had not widespread dissemination to those needing the technology accompanied the discoveries. The success of new medical technologies, therefore, testifies as much to the tendency of society to trust medical experts who recommend these technologies as it does to the brilliance of the innovators. The establishment of trust, like the reinforcement of dependence on doctors, requires effective persuasion that we can and should rely on physicians (Starr 11). As Starr (4-5) demonstrates, medical authority rests to a large extent on the power accorded those who wield power over life and death, a power transcending the bounds of medical technique.

A second form of repression concerns the autonomy of the medical community. Physicians, like other specialists, tend to insulate themselves from criticism originating from outside the community of specialists. Doctors rarely testify against colleagues during malpractice suits. Furthermore, the medical community restricts communicative exchanges between 'outsiders' and medical professionals. This restriction has roots in ancient Greece, where medicine was practiced by people who had been

> initiated into the secrets of disease and healing, hence a knowledge forbidden to laymen. 'Holy things,' says The Law, 'are revealed only to holy men; it is forbidden to impart them to laymen until they have been initiated into the mysteries of the science' (L. 4, 62). 'I shall impart the precepts, the oral lessons and the rest of the instruction to my children, to the children of my master and to pupils bound by a pledge and an oath according to the medical law, but to no other,' prescribes the Oath (L. 4, 630). (Entralgo 155)

This passage demonstrates how professional sovereignty could translate easily into autonomy. The physician, guardian of the profession's mystique, can legitimately withhold information from those deemed unqualified to comprehend the data. The information withheld might range from not disclosing to a patient basic medical statistics such as the patient's blood pressure, to not informing terminally ill patients of their condition.

Oliver Wendell Holmes captured the assumption behind such discursive restriction in his valedictory address to Harvard Medical School graduates in 1858: "Say not too much, speak it gently, and guard it cautiously. Always remember that words used before patients or their friends are like coppers given to children" (400). If the physician treats the untrained public as children, what need has the doctor to submit to any authority other than that of the medical profession?

A sovereign medical profession epitomizes what Farrell calls technical knowledge "grounded upon a consensus removed from public scrutiny" ("Social Knowledge II" 330). When an activity or profession removes itself from public scrutiny, it simultaneously absolves itself from public accountability. This lack of accountability does not imply immorality or an intent to harm the public, but it does represent an unchecked authority with potential to escape responsibility for its developments.

Disagreement Among Experts

Reliance on experts also poses the problem of technical rhetoric's relationship to non-expert audiences. Since audiences can equate expertise with authority, as in the case of physicians, specialized skills and training often appear as sufficient conditions for effective communication. The treatment of expertise as a characteristic of the speaker makes it difficult to account for or adjudicate conflicts between experts when they disagree on issues within their area of specialization.

In the case of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident, the inability of technical experts to agree with one another and to appeal to audiences' needs for reassurance and forthrightness "generated and sustained" the crisis (Farrell & Goodnight 273). The public simply was not informed about the full extent of the nuclear accident or of radioactive waste released into the Susquehanna River. Although technical experts withheld such information under pretenses of ignorance or a desire 'not to alarm the public,' never did the experts acknowledge the limits

of their own discursive practices (Farrell & Goodnight 274, 282). The experts apparently did not consider how the authority to speak is as much an entitlement invested to the speaker by the audience as it is a privilege resulting from specialized training (Lyne & Howe 143). The Three Mile Island incident exemplifies perfectly what happens if technical experts overstep the bounds of their specific training. In this case,

> no technical specialist--nuclear or otherwise--was prepared to speak beyond the margins of precision in his or her own discipline. No single representative or scientist at Three Mile Island would risk speaking generally, or pronouncing definitively on matters that remained technically uncertain. (Farrell & Goodnight 287)

The Three Mile Island incident characterizes the shortcomings of disregarding the public as participants in and adjudicators of deliberative decisions (Farrell & Goodnight 299).

This example of Three Mile Island also furnishes a picture of what can happen when no expert consensus can be established while society depends on such knowledge. If effective communication requires the possession of technical knowledge, then different experts speaking on a topic of their specialty should agree. When such consensus fails to materialize and the audience lacks means for weighing one technical claim against another, then a major criterion for decision-making is eroded. If experts disagree on issues within their own specialized

field, then expertise alone appears insufficient as an entitlement to speak. Such differences in opinion render pronouncements of experts less indubitable and compelling (Nelkin 51, 53, 54).

Conclusion

The modern equation of technical knowledge with specialized expertise represents an extension and alteration of the ancient Greek and Roman arguments supporting technical skill. Although depth of knowledge, specifically mastery of philosophy, qualified an orator to speak well, the ancients by no means agreed that knowledge should be monopolized by a particular profession or activity. The speaker should gain "profound insight into . . . the whole range of human nature" (De Or. I.53).

Perhaps Crassus' position could be modified to provide sound advice for future rhetors. The speaker should gain a solid grounding in a variety of subjects. Such a thorough liberal education does not require the orator to become a specialist, but to combine some degree of understanding with techniques of appropriate expression. The good speaker would be able to state a matter "better and more gracefully than the actual discoverer and the specialist" (De Or. I.51). In this way, the untrained public is not treated as fools or children. The layperson can often critique performances as well as experts (De Or. III.197), and aesthetic judgment does not necessarily require sophisticated theories (De Or. III.195).

If we bear in mind Crassus' remark that "the pursuit of

facts is unlimited, and their acquisition easy if study is reinforced by practice" (De Or. III.88), then a more democratic access to speech seems in order. Rhetorical skill, if it depends on knowledge, should rely on knowledge available to all who wish to seek it. The entire "art of oratory lies open to the view, and is concerned in some measure with the common practice, custom, and speech of mankind" (De Or. I.12). I would add the Platonic conception that oratory also concerns the betterment of humanity. 'Betterment' need not connote a particular moral agenda, but implies concern for the audience's welfare and recognition of the role the audience plays in determining its own future.

As a counter to the view that rhetoric must remain within the realm of specialists, Crassus offers this conception of speech:

> Then at last must our Oratory be conducted out of this sheltered training-ground at home, right into action, into the dust and uproar, into the camp and fighting-line of public debate; she must face putting everything to the proof and test the strength of her talent, and her secluded preparation must be brought forth into the daylight of reality. (De Or. I.157)

This position seems akin to an attempt to revive a public sphere apart from the confines of specialized discursive communities where expertise holds sway (cf. Goodnight). The revival of basic competence counterbalances the constriction of the rhetorical forum to those possessing specific technical

training. Such a move re-institutes reasonability, an appeal the common sense of the ordinary person, as a vital ingredient in effective rhetoric (Perelman 117-120). Crassus, in his desire to test claims in the battleground of the public forum, makes the point that rhetoric should remain public speaking. Once this public nature retreats in the face of expertise, rhetoric becomes a tool for manipulation by an elite instead of a means for maintaining and reinforcing human community.

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